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Candidate Critical Of Nixon Policy

Jed Reveals His CIA Past

By STEVE DIMICK

Of The Journal Staff

U. S. senatorial hopeful Jed Johnson spent more than two years as an undercover agent for the Central Intelligence Agency during the early 1960s, he said Friday.

Johnson said he carried on CIA activities in more than a dozen Asian, African and Latin American countries while working for one of the front organizations exposed in the "CIA on campus" scandals in 1967.

The former Sixth District congressman Friday released a copy of a speech he will deliver to the Oklahoma Jaycees convention Saturday, in which he reveals his CIA involvement.

He said a controversial trip to Cuba he made while a student at Oklahoma University which was later thrown back at him during his 1964 congressional race, also was actually a government-sponsored "intelligence-gathering" trip.

In his speech to the Jaycees, Johnson will attack President Nixon's new interdiction policy against North Vietnamese supply routes. He bases his criticism largely on his knowledge of the CIA, which reportedly has claimed that the blockade will not work.

Johnson quotes from the "Kissinger Papers," a secret government study conducted by the CIA and other information gathering groups and made public by columnist Jack Anderson two weeks ago. The study reported the CIA's belief that no amount of interdiction will be successful in stopping the flow of war materiel to North Vietnam.

"I am personally acquainted in some depth with the degree of precision that the CIA operates within its intelligence activities, because I worked under contract as a covert agent for the CIA prior to my election to the Congress," Johnson said.

"At that time, the CIA had extremely detailed information on such things as which hand an obscure African provincial chief would eat with and the vintage of his favorite wines," he said.

"I am convinced after reading the Kissinger Papers that the CIA estimates of our capacity to interdict supplies was done with similar attention to precision and gave absolutely no reason for encouragement that this military action will successfully bring the war to a conclusion."

In an interview with The Oklahoma Journal before his announcement Saturday, Johnson said he worked for the CIA from 1962 to 1964. He said his experience as an agent has caused him to have "complete faith" in the CIA's assessments of the situation in the agency's non-partisan position.

"I know that the CIA is very, very meticulous and careful in its evaluations and is accurate and precise," he said.

"The point is, if the CIA has given such an evaluation (of the Vietnam blockade), I know they've done a thorough assessment of the situation. They're very capable people and are not political; they're very apolitical.

"While I was never involved in CIA operations in Southeast Asia, I know personally that they literally can tell you the minutest details about minor African political figures and I'm sure they have done the same type of investigation in Vietnam," Johnson said.

Johnson said he was not at liberty to disclose his former CIA ties while he was a member of Congress because the Foundation for Youth and Student Affairs, the dummy foundation for which he worked, was still in business.

"For me to say anything would have literally endangered the lives of some of our people overseas," he said.

He came back to the U.S. early in 1964, on leave from the Foundation, and then resigned from the organization before he made his successful race for Congress.

Johnson served in Congress from 1964-66. He said the "whistle was blown" on the cover of the dummy foundation in 1967.

"I'm still not sure how much I'm at liberty to tell you," he said.

The former student leader at the University of Oklahoma said he was approached by the CIA (referred to among agents as "the firm") in 1962, a year after his graduation from college.

"They contacted you to see if you were interested and then did a very thorough security clearance," he said. "Later, you were taken to a hotel room where you had to sign an oath saying you would not divulge any secrets or critical information.

"After that, I was what they call 'under contract' to the CIA until I resigned," he said.

"It was fascinating work," he said. "If I hadn't run for Congress, I might have made a career out of the CIA."

Johnson said he actually worked for the U.S. Youth Council, which was funded by the Foundation for Youth and Student Affairs, which in turn was funded by the CIA.

His duties, about which he was never too specific, involved basically being a sort of goodwill ambassador-cum-spy.

"I led delegations of young Americans to developing nations and spoke before various legislative assemblies," he said. "We met with leaders of countries, presidents, prime ministers

Once, at an Indian Youth Congress in Tirupathi, India, I debated a couple of older

Communist officials," he said.

"I also did get information on what the political ideology was of up-and-coming political leaders," he said.

Johnson balked at the word "propaganda" when asked whether his job entailed more gathering of information or disseminating propaganda.

"It involved a lot of both," he said. "But we were never told what to say by the CIA. We were never given any orders about what to say in a speech.

"I was simply a youth leader telling them what we believe, why our economic system is the most productive, why our political system is the best."

Johnson's undercover activity began when he was still in college, with a 1959 trip to Cuba which later returned to haunt him during his congressional race in 1964.

"There were charges made during the campaigning that I had taken this trip with other student leaders in defiance of the State Department," he said. "This was untrue. The trip was sponsored by the U.S. government.

"I was asked by people in the State Department to make the trip to get information about what was going on," he said.

At the time the group of young student leaders made the trip, shortly after the Cuban revolution, "we didn't know that things in Cuba would go the way they went," Johnson said.

He said another of his missions was to debate young Communist leaders in Cuba.

However, he was not able to reveal in 1964 that he had known in 1959 that the Cuban trip was a government-sponsored one.

"It was a very interesting experience, but it was frustrating that I couldn't rebut some of the charges made against me," he said.

"As a result of that trip and some other activities I was involved in, I was later asked to become an agent for the CIA."

During his years as an agent, under the code name "Mr. Page" ("I chose that name because I had been a page in the Senate and thought it would be easy to remember,"), he was at liberty to tell only his wife of his activities.

"There were a couple of agents before me who had just disappeared," he said.

Johnson says he still has faith in the persuasive and example type of diplomacy former the kind he said is practiced by the CIA.

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